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Systemic & School Level Responses to the Imperatives of Behaviour Management: A Review of One Education System's Plan for School Improvement

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Abstract

Recognised as a significant professional and public concern, discipline in schools is currently receiving considerable attention from politicians, educational policy makers and school administrators. School effectiveness research has provided policy makers with a wealth of information and advice about what constitutes best practice in behaviour management. This information, along with other impelling social and political pressures has seen a number of recent initiatives around the world to address the issue. In this paper, the response of one school system in Queensland, Australia, is described. Its attempt to develop a cutting edge approach to the management of student behaviour problems may represent a useful blueprint for other school systems and schools. The paper provides a preliminary review of the Queensland approach and an initial analysis and evaluation of it based on best practice evidence.

Behaviour management continues to dominate as a professional concern for school administrators, classroom teachers and the public in countries around the world (Australian Education Union, 2006; Lewis, 2006; Rose & Gallup, 2006). School discipline is now seen as a major social issue and, for better or worse, is viewed in concert with growing community concerns about youth alienation and juvenile crime (Weatherburn & Indermaur, 2004). In this environment it is not surprising then that media attention and public angst have led policy makers to seek answers and politicians to call for action (Fields, 2005a).

Australian Initiatives

In Australia, the response of the national and state governments to this important issue has been remarkably swift. In 2003, the Federal government sponsored Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) released the National Safe Schools Framework, an initiative designed, in part, to ameliorate a growing community perception that students were increasingly at risk of experiencing violence in and around schools. The Framework incorporates advice to school systems and individual schools about

“existing good practice and provides an agreed national approach to help schools and their communities address issues of bullying, harassment, violence, and child abuse and neglect” (MCEETYA, 2003, p.3).

The report and its recommendations are now widely adopted in both government and private education systems around Australia.

A year earlier MCEETYA had commissioned the Student Learning and Support Services Taskforce to provide ministers with advice on how best to deal with more broadly defined student behaviour issues. MCEETYA is a highly representative body, consisting of national,

state and territory ministers of education and the New Zealand minister of education. Decisions made by this body invariably have an impact right across the country. The Taskforce initiated the Student Behaviour Management Project with the aim to develop

...guiding principles and practices that could be used to support the development of successful student behaviour management programs on a systemic, district, school, classroom and individual level in Australian education environments (De Jong, 2005, p. 355).

The Student Behaviour Management Project's report was released in 2004. It defined seven key 'principles' on which best practice in behaviour management could be based. The principles encouraged schools to take a holistic approach to discipline, using programs which created safe environments for students, supported student-centred approaches to education, were inclusive and responsive to a diversity of student needs and potentials, and which fostered good teacher-student relationships (De Jong, 2005).

The Queensland Response

Of all the Australian states and territories, Queensland has responded the most urgency to the nationally recognised imperatives in relation to behaviour management in schools. In 2004, the Queensland government established the Ministerial Advisory Committee for Educational Renewal (MACER) and identified student behaviour as one of its priority topics for advice to the Minister for Education, Training & the Arts. The Behaviour Management Sub-Committee of MACER delivered its report, entitled *Smart Schools, Smart Behaviour*, in November 2005 (Ministerial Advisory Committee for Educational Renewal, 2005). Of the sixteen recommendations made in the report, eleven were accepted for immediate action by the Department. A further four were accepted 'in principle'.

A feature of the *Smart Schools, Smart Behaviour* report was its recognition of the reciprocal relationship between student behaviour, effective learning and teaching and school leadership. In this sense, the Queensland report paralleled the findings and recommendations of the UK report on school discipline - *Managing Challenging Behaviour* (OFSTED, 2005). Other similarities between the two reports included the importance attached to achieving consistency in the development and implementation of standards of behaviour within and across schools, the provision of professional support and training for teachers and the monitoring and evaluation of, in the case of Queensland, its new policy and approach to behaviour management.

Within a year of the release of the *Smart Schools, Smart Behaviour* report the Department of Education, Training & the Arts (more commonly referred to as Education Queensland) had developed the *Code of School Behaviour* for implementation in all 1,300 Queensland state schools (Department of Education, Training & the Arts). The purpose of the *Code* was to provide a basis of certainty and consistency in standards of behaviour for all state school communities. The 'Code' reiterated a key finding of the *Smart Schools, Smart Behaviour* report, that the primary purpose of school education is learning, but that there is a close relationship between learning, achievement and behaviour. While educators had intuitively understood this linkage for some time, pedagogy and student behaviour (certainly the management of student behaviour) had been treated as two distinct aspects of schooling both at the policy level and in practice in many schools. Policy makers were alerted to how teachers viewed pedagogy and behaviour management in the findings of the Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study (Lingard & Ladwig, 2001). In that study, which became the basis for the Productive Pedagogies, many teachers saw behaviour management as a policy issue and one that had priority over considerations of teaching practice. In other words, matters of discipline and how behaviour problems were responded to, were so important that they superseded educational developments that might conflict with them. This view clearly opens the way for the existence of a lack of congruence between pedagogical

practices and behaviour management (Fields, 2005b) and Education Queensland's most recent initiatives in respect of behaviour management are an attempt to overcome this thinking.

As well as articulating expected standards of behaviour, the *Code* clearly defined the rights of students and teachers, the values which underpin Education Queensland's view of behaviour in the school context and guidelines for the delivery of consequences for unacceptable behaviour. Parents were to be provided a copy of the *Code* on enrolment and were asked to sign that they understood and supported it.

Apart from the urgency with which Education Queensland applied itself to responding to the MACER recommendations, the initial actions taken in developing and promulgating the *Code* are largely indistinguishable from the actions taken by other Australian state school systems. However, where many school systems stop at system (i.e. state) level policy statements and guidelines, Education Queensland initiated steps to make sure individual schools were actively adopting and reinforcing the *Code*. To maximise the likelihood that schools put into place plans and strategies to ensure that standards of behaviour were being met and that efforts were being made to reinforce appropriate behaviour and to help students who were having difficulty meeting behaviour expectations, schools were required to formulate detailed behaviour management plans that reflected the objectives of the *Code* (Department of Education, Training & the Arts, 2007). These plans, called the *Responsible Behaviour Plan for Students (RBPS)* began rolling out across Queensland state schools in the latter part of 2006. A typical example of a primary school RBPS is seen in Loganholme State School's plan (Loganholme State School, 2006). All schools had existing behaviour management plans, but these varied considerably from school to school in terms of goals and strategies and were often poorly communicated to the broader school community and even to teachers. After several years of existence their impact and capacity to drive the management

of student behaviour was dramatically reduced. Certainly, by their very nature, they were unable to achieve a system level goal focus or format for implementation.

Following recommendations contained in the *Smart Schools, Smart Behaviour* report, the RBPS was to include state wide mandated principles, standards of expected behaviour and guidelines for the administration of consequences for unacceptable behaviour. A second component of the RBPS was to entail a detailed statement of school community developed processes for facilitating the development of expected behaviour along a continuum of graduated responses to behaviour infringements including serious misdemeanours. The plans were the responsibility of school principals but were to be constructed collaboratively with input from all members of the school community. Final approval of the plans was given only after a review by the Regional Education Office based on their conformity with Education Queensland policy on behaviour management and their compatibility with the *Code of School Behaviour*. In detail then, RBPS were to be developed under the following headings:

- Rationale for the school's behaviour plan
- Beliefs about behaviour and learning
- Processes for facilitating expected behaviour
- Processes for responding to unacceptable behaviour
- Consequences for unacceptable behaviour
- The network of support for students with behaviour problems
- Consideration of individual circumstances
- Related legislation, policies and resources

In many ways RBPS are extraordinary documents. They provide an unprecedented and detailed insight into a school's strategy for achieving acceptable standards of behaviour and how misbehaviour is to be managed. They provide a unique and informative insight into the

thinking of school level educators and school administrators, as well as other stakeholders within the school community. They represent a blueprint for action and a mechanism for evaluation and accountability. What follows is a preliminary review and analysis of some 30 state primary school RBPS carried out in early 2007. The schools were drawn from all ten Education Queensland school regions and the behaviour plans were obtained from school web sites.

School Level Thinking About Behaviour Management

Rationale Statements

A feature of most of the RBPS examined was the reiteration of Education Queensland's pronouncements on the goal of school education i.e. that all students have the right to and should receive a quality education. Attention is then focused on the *Code of School Behaviour* and the importance attached to rights, namely the rights of all students to learn, the rights of teachers to teach and the rights of all to be safe.

The following extract from the Rationale of one school's RBPS is typical of what school's define as the basis of their approach to behaviour management:

Sherwood State School is committed to providing a supportive school environment where all members feel safe and are valued; where social and academic learning outcomes are maximised for all through a quality curriculum, interpersonal relationships and school organisation; where school practices are proactive rather than reactive and where appropriate and non-discriminatory language and behaviours are defined, modelled and reinforced. (Sherwood State School, 2006, p. 1)

The emphasis on quality education, rights and the provision of a safe, supportive and inclusive school environment are the dominant themes of RBPS rationale statements.

Underpinning Values

The *Code of School Behaviour* is based on five values or value clusters – professionalism, respect, innovation and creativity, diversity and inclusiveness and excellence. In RBPS, schools tend to acknowledge these but then define additional values to give their school a unique focus. Values such as integrity, honesty, responsibility, tolerance, cooperation, care and compassion are frequently identified.

The use of values in school education is a somewhat contentious issue at the present time in Australia. On the one hand we have a national government that wishes to obtain a consensus on the values which our society recognises and cherishes, and, on the other hand, there is recognition that the pluralistic nature of Australian society makes such an objective difficult to achieve (Haywood, 2004; Department of Education, Science & Training, 2005). This conflict has seen concepts such as multiculturalism being called into question with the view being expressed within the national government that multiculturalism has taken the nation down a path that encourages an unchecked diversity of beliefs and cultures and thus making it difficult to define what the nation actually stands for (Albrechtsen, 2006; Gordon & Topsfield, 2006). While this issue is being addressed in the media and at a political level at the moment, it has real implications for schools and school communities in Queensland who must generate a set of values that reflect the wishes of their diverse constituencies and at the same time be sensitive to the political, if not yet policy pressures, to standardise and limit the values society embraces. School systems right across Australia now celebrate multiculturalism and have incorporated into their curriculum the related concepts of diversity and inclusion. These ideas must co-exist

with, certainly in the area of behaviour management, pressures for standardisation, as in a uniform view of what constitutes acceptable behaviour.

On a practical level, the question has to be asked, what real impact on the thinking and behaviour of teachers and students do values statements have? It is not uncommon to find that many teachers, let alone students, are unable to identify the values which their school espouses. Further, many, if not most values adopted by schools are somewhat abstract concepts and, unless their meaning is explained and illustrated through concrete examples and frequent reference at the school and at the classroom level and communicated consistently by teachers and others who work in schools, they are unlikely to provide the vision and to be the driving force they are intended to be.

Beliefs About Behaviour

With respect to beliefs about behaviour, a recurring theme across RBPS is the view that children choose to behave as they do and must accept responsibility for their actions. The shift in emphasis from behavioural theory explanations of behaviour to cognitive and constructivist understandings, parallels the rise in constructivist approaches to learning and pedagogy (Fields, 2005b). This shift is not new and has been underway for some time. For student behaviour management however, the implications of this shift are that approaches to the management of behaviour need to move from controlling and directing what students do to guiding, encouraging and supporting students to make appropriate choices about their behaviour, with the ultimate goal of assisting students to become self-regulating. Education Queensland has adopted a supportive school environment approach for some time now and it is clear from looking at school RBPS, both the language of support and the mechanisms to offer support remain a major feature of school approaches to behaviour management. Having said this, many of the reward and punishment strategies used by schools for decades and which are standard practices in behavioural approaches to

discipline, still feature prominently in school disciplinary practices. The use of external rewards and incentives for appropriate behaviour, is still very much a part of the typical school experience. Indeed, with greater importance now attached to preventive and proactive behaviour management and the recognition of students who behave appropriately, such extrinsic rewards and motivators are featuring more in the day to day life of schools. Some educators would argue that the heavy reliance on external rewards is actually counterproductive to the goal of student self-regulation (Glasser, 2000).

Communicating Standards of Behaviour

While it is no longer accepted to talk about 'punishment' in the school context – 'consequences' is now the preferred terminology, many of the consequences currently employed in schools for inappropriate behaviour e.g. loss of privileges, detention etc, are aversive in many respects and in fact fit the technical definition of punishment. Whether consciously or not, schools are able to avoid many of the negative side effects of punishment by ensuring that consequences, where possible, are logically related to the offence, understood by the student and applied fairly, consistently and respectfully. The recommended use of logical consequences was a feature of many of the RBPS examined for this paper.

Targeting Behaviour Support

To make sure that everyone within the school community understands what standards of behaviour apply within the school, schools have typically promulgated a set of school rules. These, in turn, have been supplemented with rules at the classroom level and a myriad of procedures for everyday classroom and school activities. School rules still feature in RBPS but greater emphasis now is given to a detailed statement of rights and associated responsibilities. Where rules apply specifically to student behaviour, rights and responsibilities are defined for all members of the school community, including teachers and parents. The public statement of teacher responsibilities is relatively new within

education systems across Australia but appear to be generally understood and accepted by the teaching profession.

The *Smart Schools, Smart Behaviour* report acknowledged, as have similar reports around the world, that the great majority of school students are generally well behaved. Education Queensland suggests that eighty percent or more of students fall into this category.

Behaviour management at this level focuses on mild, albeit frequently occurring, forms of misbehaviour. There is the strong expectation that class teachers will have the necessary knowledge and skills to deal with this behaviour themselves without the need for additional support or the need to resort to an office referral.

In the order of 5 – 15 % of students are understood by Education Queensland to exhibit more frequent and more serious forms of misbehaviour, requiring support over and above what an individual class teacher can provide. Finally, there are those students whose behaviour is serious enough to warrant significant and intensive support. Students in this category (some 1 – 5 % of all school students) exhibit extreme forms of anti-social behaviour and even criminal behaviour. They are in need of one-to-one support, special programs and modified timetables. They are frequently suspended from school and in some cases are removed to alternative education settings (somewhat euphemistically called Positive Learning Centres in Queensland).

A significant benefit of viewing the overall behaviour management challenge in this three-tiered way is that it clearly shows teachers where their responsibilities lie and when they can legitimately and with confidence seek support. Further, it assists in the identification and marshalling of resources and support services and efficient and targeted use of those resources and services. What it also does is expose where a school is lacking support services, as the percentage of students requiring targeted and/or intensive support will vary considerably from school to school. In Queensland, school regions and districts have some

capacity to move around and allocate resources to where they are needed the most, although it is a reality facing all school systems that even for this arguably critical area, the available resources will never be sufficient to meet the demand. Particularly vulnerable in Queensland, a state of some 1.7 square kilometres and nearly six times the size of the UK, are schools with relatively low enrolments and schools in remote and rural areas where many services are not readily available.

Behaviour Levels Systems

Running alongside the whole-school, intensive and targeted framework of support for students with behavioural adjustment problems, are behaviour levels systems. Employing either coloured or numbered levels, all students are placed at a level appropriate to their behaviour and move up or down a level as behaviour improves or worsens. Each level is then linked to appropriate types of support, and, for that matter, sanctions and consequences as well. Levels systems were in existence prior to the introduction of the *Code of School Behaviour* and RBPS. The difference between the new and the old, on paper at least, is the stronger emphasis on the provision of support as needed. In the past, levels systems, while supposedly developed within a 'supportive school environment' framework, were utilised more to identify and track students and to assign consequences for inappropriate behaviour, then they were to provide appropriate types of support.

Consideration of Individual Circumstances

The *Code of School Behaviour* requires that when applying consequences for unacceptable student behaviour, the individual circumstances and actions of the student and the needs and rights of school community members will be considered at all times. Factors most often recognised in school RBPS as needing consideration include the student's age, gender, cultural background, disability, socio-economic situation, family care arrangements and the student's emotional and mental health.

Legislation, Policies and Resources

Education in state schools in Queensland and the activities of school staff are regulated by numerous pieces of legislation and a myriad departmental policies. The *Smart Schools, Smart Behaviour* report acknowledged that school principals carried a heavy burden in terms of their knowledge of legislation and policies and their responsibilities under them. The *Code of School Behaviour* provided a degree of certainty about what principals could and should do in respect of school discipline. In addition, Education Queensland has provided a list of relevant Acts and policies along with, in many cases, web links to the documents for ease of access by school administrators and teachers. These lists are routinely included in school RBPS along with links to other relevant documents and web sites such as the National Safe Schools Framework, the National Framework for Values Education in Australian Schools, Bullying No Way and Mind Matters (a student mental health program).

The Code, RBPS and Best Practice in Behaviour Management

The Student Learning and Support Services Taskforce of MCEETYA identified in its study of behaviour management in schools the characteristics of best practice in addressing student behaviour problems (De Jong, 2005). Seven characteristics were isolated and these provide a useful basis for the review of any school system and school level behaviour management policy and strategies. What follows is an examination of how well Education Queensland's Code of School Behaviour and school RBPS meet the seven characteristics. In this discussion, characteristics associated with curriculum and pedagogy have been combined because of their similar relation to student behaviour. As such, six characteristics, framed as questions, are discussed here.

Does the Plan include a clearly articulated and comprehensive behaviour management policy?

The answer to this question is in the affirmative. Education Queensland has revised its 1998 policy on behaviour management (Department of Education, Training & the Arts, 2006) and in its *Code of School Behaviour* and RBPS has provided a clear and consistent view on behaviour management from the Departmental level to the school and classroom levels. The plan and related strategies have been developed in response to both national and state reviews of disciplinary practices in schools and to current thinking about how the management of student behaviour should be approached. Best practice is seen here as being student-centred, inclusive, responsive to individual differences and needs, educative rather than purely punitive in orientation, non-coercive and based on rights and responsibilities (De Jong, 2005). These concepts find a place in many of the RBPS examined for this paper and represent a significant advance on earlier EQ policy and strategy (Department of Education, 1998), both in terms of relation to research on behaviour management and to detailed advice and guidance to teachers and school administrators.

Does the Plan incorporate a health-promotive culture?

A health-promoting approach is adopted when a school attaches major importance to safety as a basic need and right within the school setting, encourages positive peer relations and the development of prosocial behaviour (De Jong, 2005). Schools are on track to satisfy these criteria for best practice when they develop a strong pastoral care program and aim to maximise student connectedness and involvement within the life of the school. It has been noted earlier that the provision of a safe and supportive school environment has been a major goal of Education Queensland's new focus on behaviour management and was a central theme of its earlier behaviour management policy entitled *Management of Behaviour in a Supportive School Environment – Schools and Discipline* (Department of Education, 1998). Based on an examination of 30 RBPS, it was found that many schools have highly developed pastoral care programs and anti-bullying strategies. Some schools have identified that they use commercial and/or pre-packaged social skills

training programs for students needing targeted or intensive behaviour support. The listing of the *Mind Matters* mental health program (Commonwealth of Australia, 2000) as a resource for schools was observed for 23 of the 30 school RBPS examined for this paper. The issue of the mental health of students has only recently come to the fore in Australia and there is a sense that schools are playing 'catch up' in respect of how mental health is formally addressed within the broad school curriculum and what might be the role of teachers in this regard.

Does the school provide a relevant, engaging and stimulating curriculum and a pedagogy which is challenging and responsive?

While not a direct feature of behaviour management plans, the link between curriculum, quality teaching and student behaviour is now widely acknowledged. It is difficult to imagine that students will wholeheartedly engage in the learning experience when learning tasks and activities are viewed by them as having no immediate or practical benefit and when teaching is uninspiring. Where the outcome is poor literacy and numeracy skills, disengagement and alienation can follow, with obvious flow on effects to student behaviour.

The relationship between curriculum, pedagogy and student behaviour is reciprocal, with the very best learning experiences and teaching failing to have an impact where classroom management is poor and behaviour management ineffectual. The interrelationship between curriculum, pedagogy and student behaviour is recognised in the *Code of School Behaviour* and finds a place in many school RBPS. School behaviour plans however, do little more than stress the importance of the teaching-learning experience to student engagement and cooperation. What constitutes good pedagogy and an engaging curriculum remains very much a matter addressed at the school level separate to or at best parallel with the subject of behaviour management. Educators, including teacher educators it seems, haven't as yet a language and a means to comfortably tie the two together.

Does the Plan promote a democratic, empowering and positive approach to classroom management?

The primary distinguishing feature of this characteristic are the efforts made at the school and classroom levels to build positive teacher-student relationships. The emphasis on 'relationships' in behaviour management is not new, but the current focus clearly elevates the subject to a new level of importance. It reflects a shift in thinking about behaviour management away from what teachers 'do to' students to how teachers 'work with' students and to the relationship teachers develop with students. The goal remains the same – student cooperation and student engagement, the means is different and one which is potentially more democratic, empowering and positive. No doubt teachers will readily accept the reasoning underlying this shift. Whether they can, with any confidence or commitment, move towards working with students and ultimately towards the goal of student self-discipline remains to be seen. The day to day and immediate demands of managing 25 or more students in a class may be too all-consuming of teacher time and effort to allow teachers to fully commit to engage in relationship building with their students. RBPS reflect this dual focus – the task of managing groups of students and the long-term goal of working with students and encouraging them to be more self-regulating. The regulation of student behaviour in the classroom and around the school is spelled out in considerable detail in RBPS. At the same time these plans focus on the responsible thinking and behaving process and working with students to encourage good behaviour. Getting the balance right is clearly important, but knowing how to achieve this balance, especially at the school level, will require more attention than is presently evident in either central office or school initiatives.

Does the school have well established internal and external support structures and partnerships?

The identification of support for students at the three levels of behaviour support discussed earlier in this paper (whole school, targeted and intensive) is a major component of RBPS. Students needing targeted and intensive interventions require extraordinary provisions, often involving agencies and services drawn from outside the school itself. Given the recognised percentages of students at these two levels i.e. up to 20% of the school enrolment, the demand for support services can be considerable. Schools in their RBPS list an impressive array of support persons and services including behaviour support teachers, guidance officers, school nurses, parent volunteers and mentors, teacher aides, police liaison officers, Life Education Program, Community Health, Child & Youth Mental Health, and the Juvenile Aid Bureau to name just a few. On paper schools may appear well resourced. In reality, services can be stretched to the limit or spread thinly to the point of being ineffectual. In a school of 500 students as many as 30 – 100 students might, for example, benefit from work with a school Guidance Counsellor (School Psychologist). As Guidance Counsellors may service two to three primary schools their capacity to provide for the needs of all but the most difficult and challenging students is severely limited. If needed services and support cannot be provided, the goal of achieving a supportive school experience for students with behaviour adjustment problems can be undermined. One can imagine schools, perhaps reluctantly, needing to fall back on highly managerial and even punitive responses to students who cannot or will not conform to school standards of behaviour. As the *Code of School Behaviour* recognises that the rights and needs of all members of the school community need to be accommodated, it is not difficult to predict that the interests of the majority will prevail over the minority of students who have difficulty adjusting to school standards of behaviour and who are viewed as unappreciative and unresponsive to efforts made by the school on their behalf.

Does the school provide an alternative flexible learning environment for students with behaviour adjustment problems?

This characteristic acknowledges that the traditional school curriculum and structure is difficult for many students to adjust to and that alternative timetables, curriculum options and programs may be necessary for many students to complete their schooling. In some cases an alternative educational placement may be the best option. Several states have such alternative school provisions variously described as Suspension Centres or, in the case of Queensland, Positive Learning Centres. These centres are few in number and can cater for a relatively small number of students, most often secondary students. Where students must remain in the primary school for their education it is seen as good practice that they are provided with an individualised education program, one which shares many of the elements of IEP's for students with disabilities but where the focus is predominantly on behaviour. In Queensland these plans are called Individualised Behaviour Support Plans and are developed by school personnel in collaboration with regional office behaviour support specialists and guidance officers. So, in respect of this characteristic of best practice, Education Queensland has responded well; although one could argue that the 14 Positive Learning Centres established over the past year or two are grossly insufficient in an school system that caters for 490,000 students and which reports over 40,000 student suspensions annually (Livingstone, 2006; Queensland Government, 2007).

Discussion

Education Queensland's new approach to behaviour management in schools is a bold attempt to create a discipline strategy for the state that is based on research and current thinking. The enthusiasm with which the Department of Education, Training & the Arts accepted the recommendations of its independent committee set up to provide advice on exemplary practices in behaviour management shows an openness that has not always been evident in relation to either curriculum development or behaviour management policy. In 1996 after a very successfully state wide trial of Restorative Justice involving 119 state schools, funding of this approach was withdrawn (Thorsborne, 2001). Restorative Justice is a conferencing strategy for students who engage in serious forms of antisocial behaviour, it

is used extensively in the juvenile justice system in Australia and elsewhere (Johnstone & Van Ness, 2006). The project coordinator offered as explanation for the Department's lack of support namely, that central office staff were uncomfortable with the shift from control and punishment as the primary approaches to discipline to one of building and sustaining positive relations in school communities (Fields, 2003). There has been no such hesitancy in the recent actions of Education Queensland to the challenge of managing student behaviour in its schools today and real leadership and forward thinking is being shown in this regard.

Many educators and educational researchers would be surprised at the way in which a large government body has so readily taken on the findings of educational research, an input which has notoriously struggled to find a voice in government policy making in the past. One can only suggest that the social and political imperatives and strident calls for answers to behaviour problems in schools and more broadly within the community has contributed to Education Queensland's willingness to take advice and to act so quickly.

Three things stand out in Education Queensland's new approach. Firstly, there is the desire to establish well defined standards of behaviour for all members of the school community and to have these standards apply consistently across the state. Secondly, there is the unequivocal linking of teaching, learning and behaviour so that while the primary purpose of schooling is learning, factors such as quality teaching and effective behaviour management are seen as integral to the achievement of this goal. Finally, there is the emphasis placed on the importance of developing positive and constructive relations among all members of the school community – educators, students and parents. It is these three things that are seen as guiding school behaviour management plans in Queensland state schools today.

The requirement of schools to develop behaviour management plans around these three emphases has given teachers and school leaders the opportunity to reflect on how they should approach behaviour management and how they should respond to a growing body of research and knowledge about what is considered best practice. Many schools are long overdue to complete their plans and to have these endorsed. This could be interpreted that the task has been a challenging one and that a less than committed effort to produce the plan will stand out as unconvincing and will not stand up under the approval process or public scrutiny.

In the end though, the *Code* and Responsible Behaviour Plans for Students are just documents. Bringing them to life will require the whole-hearted efforts of all key stakeholders. There is no doubt that the effectiveness of the RBPS will depend on strong leadership from school principals and other senior school staff. No one is better placed to oversee and drive the implementation of RBPS and principals have been assigned this responsibility. School systems, both public and private in Australia and elsewhere will be keenly following the progress of this ambitious school improvement initiative.

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